

VZCZCXRO9136
OO RUEHCN RUEHGH RUEHVC
DE RUEHBJ #4575/01 3530026
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 180026Z DEC 08
FM AMEMBASSY BEIJING
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1448
INFO RUEHOO/CHINA POSTS COLLECTIVE
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHMFIS/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIJING 004575

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP AND EAP/CM

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/17/2033

TAGS: PREL PGOV MARR CH JA KS

SUBJECT: A NORTHEAST ASIAN SECURITY ARCHITECTURE: BEIJING
VIEWS

Classified By: Acting DCM Aubrey Carlson. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) Summary: While the Six-Party Talks might eventually evolve into a Northeast Asia Peace and Security Mechanism (NEAPSM), most experts in Beijing believe a NEAPSM will only be possible after complete denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula and the United States and Japan normalize diplomatic relations with the DPRK. Until that time, a more effective mechanism to address issues of common concern would be a trilateral arrangement among China, Japan and the United States, our sources maintain. Such a grouping, at an appropriate level and with a realistic agenda, would build confidence among the three largest economies in the region and might help identify areas for collaboration. If such a mechanism proved effective, our contacts assert, it might eventually evolve into something larger, even an Asia Pacific G-8 that would include other Asia-Pacific states such as Russia, the ROK, Indonesia, Australia and India although such a grouping is likely years away. Chinese officials stand ready to meet with U.S. and Japanese counterparts to flesh out this idea. End Summary.

The Need for a Mechanism in NE Asia

¶2. (C) Most experts in China recognize the need for a forum where leaders in Northeast Asia can address issues of common concern. "Southeast Asia has ASEAN, Europe has the OSCE, Latin America has the OAS, why is it that this region, with most of the world's economic potential and enormous strategic importance has no comparable mechanism" asked MFA Deputy Director General for Policy Planning Le Yucheng. While acknowledging regional participation in APEC, ASEAN Plus 3, the East Asia Summit and other regional fora, our interlocutors uniformly find those groupings either too cumbersome or too large to effectively address issues unique to Northeast Asia. "APEC is too big, ASEAN is too far away and the EAS hasn't demonstrated it can do anything," noted Dr. Yang Bojiang of the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR).

¶3. (C) While they all acknowledge the utility of a mechanism to address the problems of Northeast Asia, our contacts have several views on how such a mechanism should be composed. Basically, they envision three different groupings: either a Northeast Asia Peace and Security Mechanism (NEAPSM) made up of the six national participating in the Six-Party Talks, a trilateral forum made up of the most important economies in Asia: Japan, China and the United States, or a more ambitious pan-Asian grouping to include key states in Southeast Asia, Australia and South Asia. While there is a divergence of opinion, most experts in Beijing view a trilateral U.S.-PRC-Japan grouping as the

one most effective, at least in the short term.

NEAPSM

¶4. (C) Most of our contacts support the Six-Party Talks as the best mechanism available to improve stability on the Korean Peninsula. Ambassador Ma Zhengang, President of the China Institute of International Studies (CIIS) characterized the Six-Party Talks as "the best chance to solve the problems on the Korean Peninsula." However, all of our Chinese interlocutors maintain that the creation of a NEAPSM would be premature until the Six-Party Talks reach a successful conclusion as measured by a denuclearized Korean Peninsula and the establishment of diplomatic relations with the DPRK by Japan and the United States. Any "premature" establishment of a NEAPSM to address issues not directly linked to denuclearization would distract North Korean negotiators from the Six-Party process, they maintain.

¶5. (C) Counselor Ma Mingqiang of the MFA's Office for Korean Peninsula Affairs (the office directly responsible for supporting China's participation in the Six-Party Talks) recently assured PolOff that China supports the NEAPSM once the Six-Party Talks are complete. Ambassador Ma Zhengang also expressed China's full support for the three goals of the Six-Party Process: normalization of diplomatic relations between the United States and the DPRK, denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and the creation of the NEAPSM. However, Ambassador Ma also emphasized that a NEAPSM will not be possible until denuclearization and normalization.

BEIJING 00004575 002 OF 003

¶6. (C) Furthermore, a number of skeptics in Beijing and elsewhere question the wisdom of including North Korea in any regional mechanism to address issues beyond denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula. Dr. Liu Jiangyong from the Institute of International Studies at Tsinghua University suggests that the gridlock between Japan and North Korea over the Japanese abductees issue portends similar difficulties in any regional forum that include the DPRK. "What does the DPRK have to offer on larger issues beyond the Korean Peninsula," Liu recently asked PolOff. Other diplomats in Beijing point to the lack of progress made by the NEAPSM Working Group, set up under the Six-Party Talks aegis and chaired by Russia as evidence that creating a functional NEAPSM might prove too difficult. Hiroyuki Namazu, Counselor at the Japanese Embassy in Beijing described the NEAPSM Working Group as little more than something to make the Russians feel like they are part of the Six-Party process.

A U.S.-PRC-Japan Trilateral Mechanism

¶7. (C) Although Beijing experts believe that a regional dialogue comprised of the Six-Party Talks participants must wait until Korean denuclearization is achieved, Chinese government officials and scholars generally embrace the concept of a trilateral China-Japan-United States forum as an interim step. MFA DDG Le Yucheng is an enthusiastic supporter of a trilateral U.S.-China-Japan dialogue. In a November 19 meeting with visiting EAP DAS Alex Arvizu, Le noted that China had proposed a trilateral U.S.-China-Japan framework in 2008 adding that the idea remains "worth discussing." Dr. Zhu Feng, of Peking University's School of International Studies sees the U.S.-China and the Japan-China relations as the two most important in Asia. As such, Zhu maintains that the time is ripe to establish a trilateral mechanism to explore areas for collaboration. He goes so far as to suggest such a grouping is essential if countries in the region eventually decide to construct a pan-Asian security apparatus.

¶8. (C) Although, MFA Japan Division Deputy Director Lu

Guijun maintains that Sino-Japanese relationships are "on a positive development trend" he also has expressed concern that political inertia in Japan is preventing Tokyo from playing a greater role in the Region. Lu believes that China and the United States can work together to encourage Japan to play an "important role" on the international stage and that a trilateral mechanism would be in both China's and the United States' interest. Dr. Liang Yunxiang from Beijing University's Institute of International Studies suggests that East Asia is where Europe was in the 1950s. Liang maintains that, just as what became the EU began first with smaller regional groupings to help France and Germany resolve their historic differences, it will take a similar one to help Japan and China resolve theirs.

A Trilateral Grouping Could Grow into Something Bigger

¶10. (C) Our contacts hold a variety of views about the utility of eventually seeking a broader, pan-Asia forum to address common security concerns but generally conclude that such a grouping is too ambitious right now. A few contacts, including MFA DDG Le Yucheng, believe that an Asia-Pacific G-8, to include the United States, Russia, China, the ROK, Japan, Indonesia, Australia and India might eventually evolve to attract heads of state to focus on serious trade, environmental, security and political concerns. However, most, including Le, believe that it would wiser first to set up smaller groups like a China-U.S.-Japan trilateral dialogue coupled with existing mechanisms like the ROK-U.S-Japan forum, ASEAN Plus 3 and others, share observations among those groups and let any future, larger group grow organically.

Start With A Modest Agenda

¶11. (C) Experts agree that if the United States, China and Japan agree to hold a trilateral dialogue, it will be important to set up a realistic agenda, allay the concerns of others in the region, and meet at an appropriately high

BEIJING 00004575 003 OF 003

level. DDG Le Yucheng from MFA's Department of Policy Planning suggests that a trilateral dialogue should first focus on "human issues" such as economics, trans-national crime, maritime security and the environment then, as confidence grows, other, more sensitive topics could be added. Dr. Zhu from Beijing University sees maritime security, to include anti-piracy and common search and rescue standards as a logical agenda topic. Dr. Liang Yunxiang from Beijing University believes that a trilateral dialogue should address resource scarcity and the environment.

Level is Important

¶12. (C) Most of our contacts are aware how difficult it would be to have Heads of State or even Foreign Ministers to participate in any trilateral mechanism. "Level for such a meeting would be important," noted Dr. Liu Jiangyong, from Tsinghua University's Institute of International Studies. Liu thinks that the 2 2 Dialogue in which the U.S. Secretaries of State and Defense meet with their Japanese counterparts could be a model for a trilateral dialogue but thinks it best to start more modestly, perhaps at the Vice Minister or even Director General level. DDG Le from MFA recognized that finding time for busy Ministers to meet is a perennial problem, but suggested that when lower level meetings prove productive among countries, higher-level meetings generally follow. Le suggested that working level officials in Beijing and Washington include a trilateral dialogue in talking points for upcoming senior level bilateral meetings since this would allow the MFA to assign resources to flesh-out a formal proposal for a trilateral dialogue.

Dealing with South Korea

¶13. (C) Our contacts recognize that unless handled properly any trilateral forum among China, the United States and Japan would run the risk of irritating South Korea. The Chinese Foreign Ministry's DPRK, ROK, and Mongolia Division Director Chen Hai agreed that a U.S.-PRC-Japan trilateral mechanism could play a "vital role" in the region but warned that South Korea might dislike being excluded from this new grouping. The Japanese in Beijing share this concern. However, Kunio Umeda, DCM at the Japanese Embassy in Beijing believes that ROK President Lee Myung Bak would be much less likely to view a trilateral Japan-China-U.S. dialogue as a threat to South Korean interests than his predecessors, particularly if he could be persuaded that such a mechanism would only serve to enhance stability in Northeast Asia. Umeda believes that if the three governments agree to pursue a trilateral dialogue, South Korean concerns could be addressed by the three parties publicly announcing that the forum would not address the Korean Peninsula and all three governments assuring South Korea that they would brief the ROK about the agenda in regular meetings of the PRC-Japan-ROK and U.S.-Japan-ROK dialogues.

China Suggests Next Steps

¶14. (C) In a November 19 meeting with visiting EAP DAS Alex Arvizu, MFA DDG Le Yucheng suggested that the MFA would welcome an official proposal by the United States to explore modalities of a trilateral U.S.-Japan-China dialogue early in the new year and went so far as to suggest working-level meetings in early 2009 among Japanese, U.S. and Chinese officials to flesh-out an agenda. Le suggested that his office would welcome any opportunity before that to discuss a trilateral mechanism.

Randt